

Hearing Conservation Program

Protecting the hearing of employees is a priority. This operation will take the following steps to help prevent hearing loss:

1. All employees will wear hearing protection in areas where noise levels are above 85 decibels.
2. Noise levels can be expected to be in the following ranges at full power:
 - Chain saws (105-110 decibels)
 - Chipper (100-105 decibels)
 - Stump grinder (100-105 decibels)

An annual noise level check, listed previously, should be made to identify high noise areas.

3. Employee training will be conducted for those exposed to noise above 85 decibels. This will include:
 - A safety meeting on hearing conservation
 - A discussion on proper types of protection
 - Being told to wear hearing protection
 - Documentation on a safety meeting record form
4. Employees exposed to noise over 85 decibels will wear one of the following approved types of protection:
 - Moldable inserts
 - Earmuffs attached to hardhats
 - Earmuffs attached to headband

Hearing Conservation Overview

Hearing loss can happen slowly over a period of time, or it can happen instantly with exposure to a loud, sudden noise. Either way, it can affect you as an employer.

If your employees work in conditions where they have to shout to be heard, your company probably falls where OSHA guidelines governing to hearing conservation. The allowable noise exposure for employees has been 85 decibels per eight-hour period since 1983. The noise levels associated with most machinery used in arboriculture activities ranges from 85-110 decibels. If you have such noise levels, you must have a hearing conservation program in place. You might say, "I provide hearing protection, isn't that enough?" Not according to OSHA. A complete hearing conservation program consists of five areas: (1) Sound level measurements, (2) Audiometric testing and evaluation, (3) Hearing protection, (4) Education, (5) Recordkeeping.

Sound Level Measurements: You have to know how loud your equipment is to know if you should have a program. These measurements determine what type of hearing protection your employees should use. They also help determine who should be included in the program. Many insurance companies will measure your sound levels free of charge. The N.C. Department of Labor's Consultative Services Bureau may also be able to measure noise levels for small businesses (see page 11). You can also take your own sound level measurements if you have a calibrated sound level meter. Most industrial audiometric companies can explain how to do this. Some companies may allow you to borrow a sound level meter. These options can save your company money; however, certain criteria must be met.